

Medicine vol 4.

AN
ENQUIRY

Into a late very Extraordinary
Physical TRANSACTION at E---N.

IN A
LETTER

TO AN
APOTHECARY at W-----R in B--KS.

By CH-----B-----N, Surgeon, at CH-----Y.

The SECOND EDITION.



L O N D O N :

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MDCCLVIII.



A
L E T T E R
T O

Mr. K-----r.

Ch---y, Jan. 6, 1758.

S I R,

THE loss of a favourite child by a premature death, tho' in a manner shocking, and, considering his age, unparalleled, hath not so far perverted my understanding, as to make me esteem it a subject worthy of public notice: untimely deaths are as common as they are melancholy, and errors in physical practice are not so uncommon as to be inexcusable: had my mind been affected with no

other evils, grievous as they were, I should have left them to time to remedy.—The true reason, therefore, of publicly addressing you in this manner, is grounded on the behaviour that ensued on your receiving from me the following letter.

To Mr. K——r.

Ch---y, Dec. 2, 1757.

S I R,

I Have now time to reflect on the loss of my dear child; and as the manner of his sudden death shocks me, and all mankind who hear it, I must desire, in a friendly manner, that you will insert, in a methodical course, a regular diary of your proceedings through the whole case, that I, as well as the whole branch of the fraternity, may be satisfied: the execution of this request will perhaps stop my exposing the affair in the public papers,

papers, which I am determined to do, unless I am satisfied by your account.

I am, Sir,

yours, &c.

Ch. B——n.

I think I may safely appeal to all who shall read this letter, whether any thing was contained in it so reproachful, as to draw on me your indignation, or so absurd, or illiberal, as to merit your contempt; when therefore, instead of vouchsafing me the least answer or notice, you propagated reports as false in themselves as they are injurious to me; when you ascribed my child's disorder to causes that never existed, and his death to measures injudiciously taken; when you traduced my skill in my profession, because I could only palliate his sufferings, and make his death more easy; and exempted your-
self

self from blame, because your attendance was dispensed with, just before his death, when his case was pronounced fatal.—When, lastly, by arrogance, defiance, and new contempts daily repeated, you, as it were, poisoned the wound you before had given me, I thought it incumbent on me to demand a public satisfaction, and to detect and expose your prevocations, by dragging them into open light.—Add to this, the desire I had, after experience of my own feelings, to give ease to those, who having believed, through your means, my son died of a *malignant infectious fever*, in a seat of public education, might otherwise suffer great disquietude, because they are parents, as I lately was.

These, sir, are the motive that have induced me to offer to the public the following Narrative of facts, attested by eye-witnesses, whose credit is beyond exception.

T H E

NARRATIVE.

TO the child of Mr. B---n, surgeon at Ch---y, (a remarkably *healthy, robust boy*, about eight years of age) were given several *gentle purges*, about the latter end of *October* and beginning of *November*, in order to remove some habitual kernels in his neck; which by this method, and keeping warm, were, till now, always easily dispersed. At the conclusion of this course, through *an ill-grounded suspicion* of the apothecary, who apprehended the child was going to have a scarlet fever, he was put to bed, where he was continued two or three days; but neither *fever, eruption, or sore throat* succeeding, (the child all this time being perfectly free from either) he ordered him to be

be taken up, and immediately gave him a *strong mercurial purge*, which operated violently, by *vomit* as well as stool: this dose was *twice* repeated, at short intervals. It may be necessary to observe here, that, till after taking the last mercurial purge, which was about ten days from the time he was put to bed, the child continued *extremely well in every respect*; but on that very night, the 14th of *November*, the usual symptoms of a *salivation from mercury* came on, preceded by an enlargement of the child's face, and head; his cheeks, tongue, and gums, were exceeding sore; his teeth were loose, and that night he spit plentifully. From the 15th to the 18th, the above symptoms increased, with floughs and fetid breath; and so very profuse was the salivation, that the child wetted *eleven or twelve napkins* in a day and night. Nothing, however, was yet attempted to controul

troul the salivation ; for the apothecary, in a letter to Mr. B — — n this day, tells him, that, in *his opinion*, the *spitting*, which was partly natural, and critical, must be carefully kept up ; that he thought him in a good way, and was not at all apprehensive of any present danger. The cause of his sending this letter, was occasioned by Mr. B --- n having accidentally heard his child had been indisposed ; in consequence of which he had sent over a post-chaise, in order to bring him home ; not having received, in all this time, the least intimation from the apothecary of the child's dangerous situation, though he had been frequently and warmly pressed to write to him for that purpose. Justly alarmed at so very extraordinary an account, Mr. B ---- n, early the next morning on the 19th, came over, and found the unhappy child, with several boys in the same

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room, in a deep salivation; with furrowed cheeks, sloughed tongue and lips, strongly fetid breath, and spitting immoderately. In the presence of the father, the child had so strong and *universal a convulsion*, with such frequent returns of spasms, that his last breath was every moment expected. Under these *perilous* circumstances, in consultation with the apothecary, it was agreed to give him instantly a glyster, with some opening medicines; no attempt having been made to *procure one stool since his last physic*, though it was now the fifth day. Three blisters also were applied; nourishing broths and wine were directed to be given occasionally, in order to support him. The sloughs and ulcers in the mouth were *properly* cleansed, which had by no means been so *before*; for most shameful had hitherto been the *attendance given*. Mr. B—n, after leaving proper

per remedies and directions for the above purpose, in the evening returned home, being obliged to attend a patient in a particular branch of his profession, which would admit of no excuse. Very early on the 20th in the morning he returned to *E—n*, and found the child rather better, after some stools procured by the above remedies; saw the apothecary, *who agreed* to continue the above method; and on proper gargles and applications to the ulcers, in order to abate the stench, which was now very great, the salivation rather decreased. The 21st Mr. *B---n* visited again: the salivation continued as yesterday, the smell and ulcerations increased. An eminent physician was this day called in, who was an eye-witness to the above distressful case; and averred, that he never saw a higher degree of *salivation from mercury in his life*. It was agreed to continue the above

B 2 method,

method, and to support him properly. The apothecary *now frequently attended*, and directed himself a glyster this night, the physic not having performed its office. Mr. B--n himself staid all the day, frequently washing, cleansing, and dressing the ulcers on the lips, cheeks, tongue, and gums with the usual applications. On the 22d Mr. B--n visited again, *with the apothecary*, and found the child rather more chearful; but the salivation, fetid breath, sloughs, and ulcers very great. On the 23d, particular business prevented Mr. B--n's attendance; but he was assured by the apothecary, if the child should be worse, that he would immediately acquaint him, *as he lived not an hour's ride from him*. The 24th Mr. B--n, on his return, found the symptoms in general worse, the child having had another strong fit. The apothecary's attendance was now dispensed with,

with, whose presence had long been insupportable to the child; and Mr. B---n himself attended all this day. On the 25th a surgeon was called in, who was a witness to the deep sloughs in the child's tongue, cheeks, lips, and gums, which were now become extremely fetid: several of them were cut away, and others scarified, in the presence of many witnesses. This gentleman was of the same opinion with the physician, that the case was *a strong salivation from mercury*, and that the child was in the most imminent danger. In consultation with the physician, the bark was directed, in such quantities as the child's stomach would bear; and Mr. B---n sat up all this night to give it himself, and to foment and dress the now numerous ulcers. On the 26th the same treatment was pursued by Mr. B---n all day; and the bark continued: but in the evening the child sunk
apace,

apace, and expired that night, after supporting a *strong salivation* for *thirteen days*.

This is a true and impartial state of the case, which I present as such to the public and you : and leaving you, sir, to such reflections as must necessarily occur on the perusal, I shall now produce the following letter of your's to me ; with this observation, that though you could never be prevailed on to *write me the truth*, yet you have taken great pains to *conceal* it from me. You were now, indeed, forced to the alternative, of sending my child, or giving me your reasons for such refusal ; otherwise, I suppose, you had persevered in that silence, which it was so much your inclination and your interest to observe.

Mr.

*Mr. K---r's Letter to Mr. B---n.**E—, Friday morning, (Nov. 18.)**Dear Sir,*

I Am very sorry to tell you, that the situation master *B--n* is at present in, renders his removal just now impracticable. As he had *very little of the scarlet eruption, or redness in his skin, during the feverish state of his disorder*, I apprehend a great part of the *morbid cause was lodged on the tonsils and parotid glands, which remained much enlarged, and remarkably hard*, after his fever went off, and the skin recovered its natural colour. I was, indeed, at one time, apprehensive the glands of his neck would suppurate: I ordered the swelled parts to be covered with warm fresh wool, and gave him, at proper distances, *gentle purges, with Infus. Sen. Manna, Tart. Solub.* which

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operated

operated very well, but seemed to have no kind of effect on the swelled glands, which remainèd, indeed, surprisingly large: so that I thought it absolutely necessary to administer *a more stimulating kind of purge*; for which purpose I sent him the following * *Pulv. Basilic. rhei Jalap à gr. viij*, to be taken in the morning, in a spoonful of Sur. Rosar. It operated *briskly*, and appeared to agree quite well: it was therefore repeated again *Sunday* last, when he seemed pretty well, *except the swellings on each side of his neck, which were rather less*, though his purging powder worked him *ten or twelve times*. *Wednesday* he appeared to have a considerable discharge from the salivary glands, which has kept up ever since---but, thank God, it has intirely removed the swell-

* The Pulv. Basilic. is composed of equal parts of Diagrydium, Ceruse of Antimony, Cream of Tartar, and Mercurius Dulcis.

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ing from his neck, which, before the discharge, was of an alarming size. *The acrimony of the infectious humour of this kind of complaint, you know, produces most amazing ulcerations and deep sloughs, during the acute stage ;* and I have too often experienced the tedious ill consequences that follow a scarlet fever, when the eruption in the skin has not been sufficient to discharge the *malignant matter*. — You will excuse my reasoning in this manner to a person of your *skill and experience*. You will, I hope, be satisfied that all possible care has and will be continued to him ; but the spitting, which, *in my opinion, is partly a natural and critical drain from the lymphatic vessels, must be carefully kept up*. — I have sometimes seen an œdematous swelling all over the body, after this complaint ; and the day before his spitting came on, his legs were much swelled, as the

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nurse

nurse informed me, when she put him to bed. — I have ordered every thing proper for him, as to regimen, in Mrs. B—n's house, whose *friendly and affectionate concern* for him, you are well assured of.--When your business will permit, I shall be glad to see you at my house, and will then attend you to E---. --- I should certainly have wrote to you to-day, *if you had not sent the bearer over. -- I think him in a good way, and am not apprehensive that he is in any present danger*; tho' I fear your lady will be much alarmed at his not being in a situation to *be removed with safety*. You will best know how to reconcile her to it; and believe me to be, with *great sincerity*,

Your, &c.

W. K——.

It

It is impossible that so extraordinary a letter as this can pass unnoticed by the reader, as it was intirely calculated to throw a veil before my eyes, and to deceive me with the grossest sophistry, and most delusive reasonings: I must beg leave, therefore, to make some observations upon it, as probably they may be of use, to prove the above suggestion, and to expose your extraordinary conduct, on this occasion.

OBSERVATIONS on Mr. K--r's
Letter.

WHAT do you mean, sir, by saying you gave the *gentle* purges, *after* the child was put to bed, for your *imaginary* fever; when you well know they were given a week or ten *days before*? Was it to prove the necessity of *then* giving *the brisk mercurial physic*? Why introduced in

this part of the letter, but to mislead or perplex? Why was not the order of time faithfully observed?

You say, that on *Sunday*, after the second *mercurial* purge, he seemed pretty well, except the swelling on each side of his neck, which was rather less: as you make no mention of the tonsils, we may suppose them lessened also. But why do you chuse to omit one of the *mercurial* purges? You well know *three* were given. Is this a proof of the weakness of your memory, or of your little regard to truth?

You say, that, notwithstanding his *purging powder* worked him *ten or twelve times*, (and, with equal truth also, you might have added, that it vomited him almost as often) on *Wednesday* he appeared to have a considerable discharge from the *salivary glands*: had you attended the child as your duty and the case demanded,
you

you would have found, that the salivation, which now wetted eleven or twelve napkins in twenty-four hours, began on the *Monday* evening, two days before. Such candid representation of facts would have obviated any suspicion of design, or artifice, in this your relation.

You say, when my child had already salivated four or five days and nights, and the salivation was then hourly rising, that, *in your opinion*, the spitting, which was *partly* a *natural and critical drain from the lymphatic vessels*, must be carefully kept up: pray, what do you mean by *partly*, and how was it to be kept up? by more *mercury*? Surely it then wanted lowering but too much.

You say, *the acrimony of the infectious humour*, YOU KNOW, produces most amazing ulcerations, and deep sloughs, during the acute stage: I ask you, were there any sloughs at all in the
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the child's mouth during the *acute stage*? Were there any on the tonsils? You mention only *hard* and *enlarged* tonsils, and *parotid glands*; and for these latter you gave the more stimulating *mercurial* physic. *Thank God*, say you, *the salivary discharge has removed the swellings from his neck.*

But I must beg leave to tell you, I DO NOT know that this distemper produces *such amazing* ulcerations, and *deep sloughs*, on the *tongue, cheeks, and lips*, as really appeared on those parts of my child; though a different kind of ulcer, and slough, does sometimes on the *uvula, arch of the mouth, and tonsils*; and this I take to be one of the characteristic marks, whereby these ulcers may be distinguished from each other; but I most certainly *do know*, that *mercury* will produce exactly such ulcers on the *tongue, cheeks, gums, and lips*, as my child had.

You

You own, that the spitting came not on, till *after* the stimulating purges : would not purges that operated as *briskly* as these, unless they had been *mercurial*, rather have checked or prevented a *critical spitting*? Why won't you at once confess, that you intended a slight salivation, as you already have that the *spitting ought to be kept up*?

You say, at the close of your letter, you *think* him in a good way : is this a proof of *your great sincerity*? With what face could you write thus to me, when my poor child had then been salivating immoderately for four days and nights; by which he was so greatly sunk and exhausted, that when I visited him early the next morning, you well know, he had such strong convulsive fits, that we both despaired of his surviving them, that very day?

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What cruelty, thus to conceal from a father, the dangerous and alarming symptoms of his child's case? How forcibly and often were you importuned for that purpose, by one, whose tenderness, *whose friendly and affectionate concern*, you with so much truth and justice have taken notice in this letter? How could you resist such interesting sollicitations? To what shall we ascribe this amazing conduct of your's? Was it to want of judgment, or to want of integrity?

These, sir, are painful considerations for me to recall, how little soever they may affect you, who are a stranger to the tender emotions in the bosom of a parent - - - such only can truly sympathize with me. - - Yet even you might have lessened my griefs, by a timely confession of your errors, could you but have sacrificed your artifice, and dissingenuity, to truth.

truth. What retributions can now be made, let justice and the disinterested voice of the public pronounce.

And now, fir, 'tis most probable, that the true state of the case stands really thus. After my child had been continued a sufficient number of days in bed, and neither fever, eruption, or sore throat appeared, you thought it high time to order him up, and treat him in a different manner. Accordingly you gave him three doses of strong *mercurial* physic, in order to remove the external glandular swelling, on which the gentle physic *seemed to you, to have no kind of effect*. But as mercury has ever been found extremely precarious in its operation, so, in this case, it took to the glands of the mouth, and, not being con-

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trouled in time, gained such an ascendancy, that in vain were afterwards, all the efforts of art to restrain its fury. Your desire to conceal this accident from me, and others, was the cause of your subsequent disingenuous conduct, and of so many delusive arguments, that were advanced, in order to support your first assertion, *viz.* That this was a *critical spitting from a malignant fever*. Whereas had you candidly confessed the truth, and consulted some of the profession in due time, who might have advised you ; 'tis more than probable that my child's life had been saved, tho' at the expence of your judgment. In order to confirm this my opinion, I refer you to the following queries.

The Q U E R I E S.

1. **W**Hether master B—n had *any scarlet fever, or sore throat*, during the time you confined him to bed; or the least appearance of the latter till after the third dose of *mercurial* physic?

2. If the child had the scarlet fever, why was he not continued longer in bed, and treated in the usual manner you treat others in that distemper? Did he not eat, drink, and sleep as usual, during all this time, and swallow with the utmost facility? Did he so much as complain of his throat, but of a stiffness only on his neck externally, from the swelled glands thereof? Can you say his tonsils were ulcerated during this stage?

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3. Is

3. Is it not certain, that, a few days from his sickening, *i. e.* being put to bed, you ordered the child up, and gave him a *brisk mercurial* purge, and repeated it twice in a few days? Did he once, during *this mercurial course*, complain of his throat, till the last day of taking? Did he not even from the time you first put him to bed, every morning eat his crusty roll with the other boys, and fare as they did, those days excepted, when he took the *mercurial physic*?

4. Had there been any crisis by spitting, or tendency thereto, previous to the purging physic, when surely it was most to be expected; would it have been prudent to pervert this salutary course of nature, by three untimely stimulating *mercurial* purges?

5. Can

5. Can it be supposed, that a crisis by the salival glands, or a spitting with sloughs, fetid breath, &c. should come on ten days after the child's recovery from the fever (as you call it) and after three doses of brisk physic? Is not this contrary to nature's usual proceedings?

6. Why do not you continue to own, as you have in your letter, that you gave him the mercurial physic to take down the swelled glands of his neck; partly perhaps with a view to a salivation?

7. Can the whole history of physic produce any parallel instance with this, of a *critical flux* from the *salival glands*, coming on *at this period*; increasing daily for a number of days, to a quart at least in 24 hours; attended with a *general enlargement of the head*;

head; with cheeks, tongue, and lips sloughed, teeth loose, and all this accompanied with great stench, in a child of eight years old? Are these the symptoms of the malignant sore throat?—if so, Is this the method of treating it?

8. But if the ulcers *were critical*, and of so *malignant* a nature as to occasion all this dreadful havock in the child's mouth, must they not have been highly contagious? Why then were several boys permitted by you, to be in the same room with him, till a few days before he died? Does not this contradict your apprehension of its being contagious; or had you a mind to spread it?

9. If these ulcers were of so *malignant* a nature, as you pretend, why was the father not consulted, whom you knew to be
a sur-

a surgeon, and lived so *very near*? for in your letter, you allow him *skill* and experience;—Were these reasons for excluding him?

10. Is there not but too much reason to believe, that you artfully intended to conceal the case from him, as well as others of the faculty; that had the child died without such inspection (and very near death the convulsions had brought him, the very first day the father did see him) you might have told your story as you pleased, and without risk of detection. Was you not often pressed to write to him, and as often refused?

11. But I beg to know, sir, who, but yourself, ever thought of giving *mercury* in *malignant sore throats*, or so immediately after *malignant fevers*? Is not this

this practice as *novel*, as it appears *dangerous*? What authority can you produce for this innovation?

12. With what truth can you aver, that as soon as the father came, you were no longer concerned; when for several days after, as the narrative shews, you continued to consult with him: in regard to the surgeon's province, you certainly could have no pretensions there, though you had usurped it but too long; and when you declare that you proposed the bark, which was not given in time, is it not a most unjust assertion, which can easily be proved upon you, by the attestation of every gentleman concerned? and to your confusion, it can be proved also, that Mr. B—n himself was the first who proposed the bark; and that you
never

never once mentioned it in consultation, or after, to him, or the physician.

13. With what face, after all this, could you inform those of the first rank, that this unhappy child died of a spitting, from a translocation of the malignant humours to the salival glands, and for want of the bark, which you advised?

14. Is it not evident, that after Mr. B—n saw his child's deplorable situation, every assistance was given, that art directs in such cases? Did he not call in an eminent physician and surgeon? did he not himself attend the child both night and day with unwearyed diligence and affection, and administer every help with his own hand? How great must be your modesty, after this, to declare, that had the child continued under

E your

your sole management, he would have recovered?

15. But if this distemper was both *malignant* and *contagious*, as you aver; would not the young gentlemen, who continued so long in the same room with him, have been infected with it?

16. Now it is evident, that the nurse, on whose bosom the child constantly reclined his head, was affected: but, instead of catching the malignant fever, how came it to pass, that she should only be affected with a slight *spitting*, attended with *sore gums*, *fetid breath*, and *loose teeth*, the usual effects of *mercurial* steams?

And now, sir, let the world judge, whether the salivation, of which my child died, was the crisis of a *malignant fever*, or the effects of *mercury*.

As

As to the direful apprehensions you have created, concerning eruptive fevers, and sore throats, &c. I shall no farther concern myself with them, than as they are immediately connected with the present question.

I think I have clearly proved, this case had nothing *malignant* or *infectious* in it, except the method of cure: that I confess was *infectious* enough.--The nurse you know was infected with it.---And upon this head your recollection will naturally carry you to the late case of a young nobleman; whose symptoms you magnified as dangerous, with your usual exaggerations: What was the consequence? Did the very eminent physician, who was brought down upon the occasion, justify this alarm in one single point? Did he discern the

least malignity? Did he guard against infection, by sending the near relations of his noble patient out of the house? No: he found nothing extraordinary in the matter, except that he was hurried down upon so frivolous an occasion. I repeat again my design in mentioning all this, is merely to expose your misrepresentation of facts, that are connected in some measure with my child's case; I want not to obstruct any of your proceedings; go on to propagate alarms as fast as you think proper.-----Approve your care and anxiety to the tender and apprehensive minds of parents; *stir up the honourable women*, and deserve their thanks by destroying their quiet.--These are little contrivances to supply the place of merit; the talents of those who have

have no better ; and if you find them prosper, I have no objection. Yet perhaps the case I have described, may be worthy in some measure of *their* attention, unless you will say, that boys are to be divided into two classes ; and that *experiments* should be made upon the vulgar, for the benefit of the noble : if this be not so ; if the same measure of skill and fidelity in our profession is to be applied to all ; the consequence is undeniable ; what hath thus happened to my child, *might* have been the fate of some youth of the most exalted rank : and then it will greatly import you to consider upon what ground you stand, and timely to betake yourself to the best defence your cause will furnish.

Supposing you, therefore, to address yourself to your vindication,

tion, let me bespeak some degree of candour, and fair dealing; and beg you first to sacrifice to truth.

—Strive not to perplex the terms of the question; or to divert the consequence, and evade the force of it, by captious and quibbling sophistry. - - - There are but two ways possible, in which your defence can be made.—If you deny the facts, and produce evidence to support that contradiction, the matter will lie open to all readers, who are capable of understanding the nature and force of testimony. If you avow the facts, and dispute the consequences, the question will then be referred to men of science in the profession; and by their decision I am contented to abide. But there is a method that may possibly suit your present disposition better; and that is, not
to

to answer at all. - - - In that case, shrug and grimace may be of use, to denote the utmost contempt of the unworthy treatment you have received. It may be proper to describe the author of these papers as a poor illiterate wretch, beneath all notice ; and the work itself as a compound of ignorance and malice, set on foot merely to traduce your character : nay, you may farther tax me with monstrous ingratitude, *in private companies*, who killed my own son by my wilful ignorance ; and dismissed you, who at that very time was restoring him to perfect health.

These methods, though rather stale and antiquated, are still in good esteem among a certain part of mankind ; but, I doubt, they will hardly serve you upon the
present

present occasion : that *conscious*
 letter of your's, Mr. K---r, hath
 told too much truth already. ---
 'Tis too late to put on defiance,
 when you have already spoken the
 language of guilt ; --- but this is
 your concern, not mine. --- I de-
 sire not in any manner to forestall
 the censure of the public ; what-
 ever conclusions, either from your
 defence, or from your silence, (as
 it may happen) should be drawn
 hereafter ; *they* are the proper
 judges ; and to *their* decision I
 submit.

F I N I S.

